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Mater Dei team to give car fuel test

By John Martin (Contact)
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Ten Mater Dei High School students will put their fuel-efficient, three-wheeled car to the test this weekend at the California Speedway in Fontana, Calif.

Shell is sponsoring Eco-marathon Americas and is offering a \$10,000 expense reimbursement to the educational institution building the car with the best gas mileage.

The contest has been held in Europe for 20 years, but this year it's being held in the United States, as well. Mater Dei is one of only two high schools attending. All other teams are from colleges and universities.

Mater Dei will be squaring off against teams from Purdue University, Rose-Hulman, UCLA and others.

"Any high school can enter that wants to. But (preparing) is a tremendous amount of time," said Dan Ritter, a



Courtesy of Mater Dei High School Justin Stute drives the 2006 Mater Dei fuel-efficient car during competition around the Indianapolis Raceway Park in April 2006. Stute is this year's team captain, and the team will be competing this weekend at the California Speedway in Fontana, Calif.



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mechanical engineer with GE Plastics, father of two Mater Dei team members and parent adviser to the Mater Dei Super Mileage Team.

Ritter credits his predecessor, Bob Neisen, with helping establish the team's winning tradition. Also putting in numerous hours with the students was faculty adviser Bob Schleter.

Mater Dei has topped collegiate competition before. The team attends an annual event for both college and high school teams in Marshall, Mich., and this weekend it hopes to better the 1,897 miles per gallon achieved a year ago.

The success is rooted in months of hard work. Members get together for two hours every Sunday afternoon. This year's first meetings were on Ritter's property.

The numerous meetings devoted to blueprints and designs can be tedious, but the fun begins after New Year's Day, when the rubber (literally) hits the road.

A few students join the club not even knowing which way to turn a wrench. But those interested and willing to make the time commitment can quickly learn both simple and difficult engineering concepts, Ritter said.

This weekend's excursion to Southern California is an added perk.

"I just like messing with cars, the building and constructing," Mater Dei junior Justin Stute said. "It all pays off, hopefully, when you win."

Mater Dei's car is about 9 feet long, 3 feet wide and 2 feet tall, barely large enough for one person. Its brake and all other controls are operated from the steering wheel.

It will be powered this weekend by a Honda 35cc, four-stroke engine. The team has been putting the car through its paces in the Roberts Stadium parking lot, and members said it is reaching about 1,500 miles per gallon.

The team raised about \$10,000 to pay for its trip. Ritter, father of team members Andrew Ritter, a sophomore, and Danielle Ritter, a senior, said the car is being hauled to the California racetrack in a

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